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AUTHOR	Stuter, Jan; Scroggs, Joyce
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ABSTRACT

Two librarians, one from Yuba County and one from Sutter County in California, prepared a cable television program as a means of presenting community information and bringing the library to the people. They put together a half-hour show which began with a self-introduction and explanation by the two librarians, and came back to them occasionally for lead-ins to various parts of the program, which included a puppet show, a slide presentation, and critique of a restaurant, an explanation of a new food stamp program, a visual book review, a preschool program, and some library ad spots. Finally the two librarians had a brief informal conversation and invited audience comment. The show had been previously announced in newspapers, on local radio, and in fliers. In spite of some technical and financial problems, the show has become a bimonthly production using various media--8mm films, slides, videotape, animation, and live presentations--as well as many skilled local volunteers, and talent and help from the local community college. (LS)

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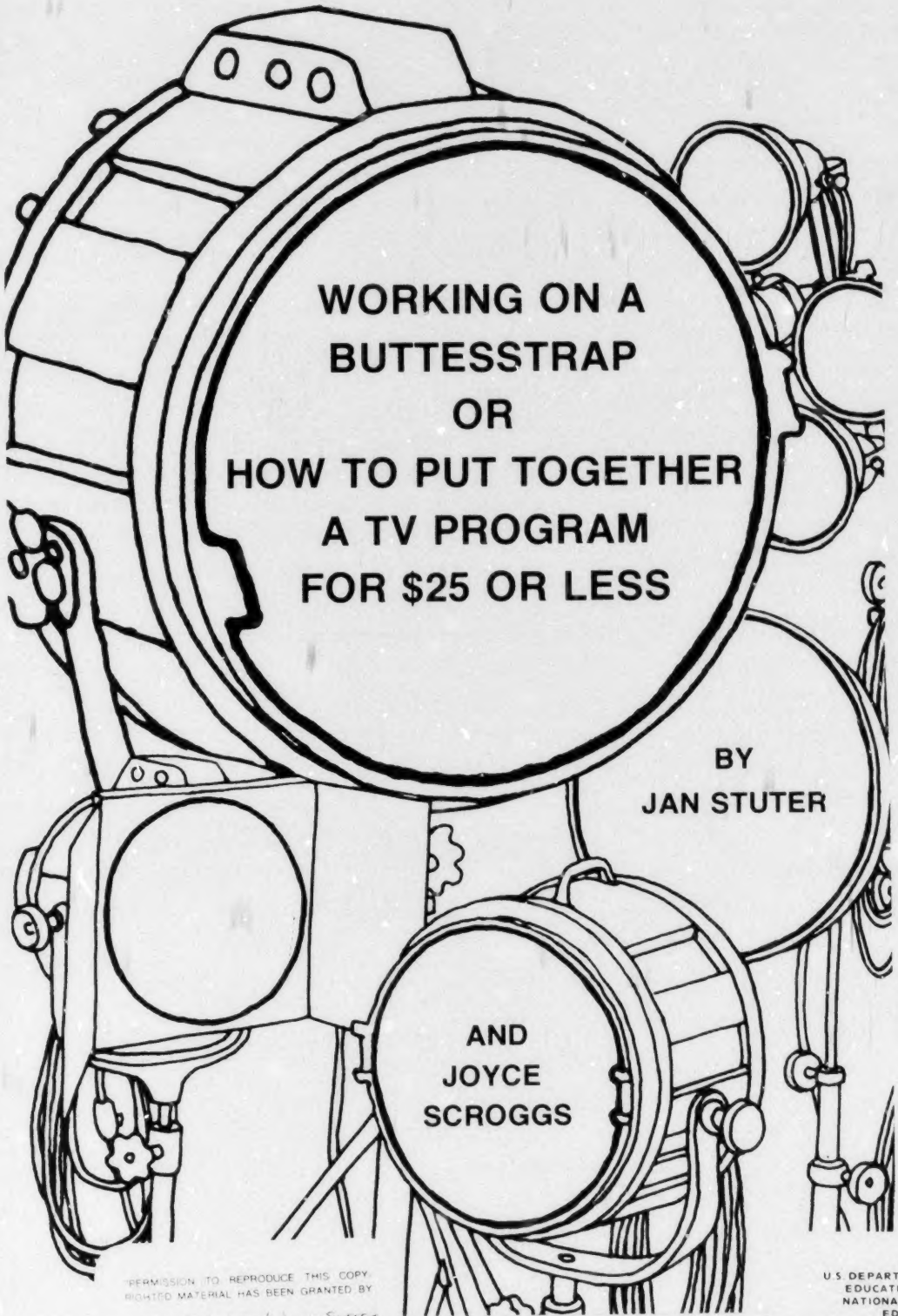

WORKING ON A BUTTESSTRAP OR HOW TO PUT TOGETHER A TV PROGRAM FOR $25 OR LESS

BY
JAN STUTER
AND
JOYCE SCROGGS

IR 001286

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SCENE: Telephone dialogue.

Joyce: It seems to be that with these two counties changing as fast as they are, people need to know more just to survive, and they should know that our libraries have that information available.

Jan: I agree. I think, too, that the libraries should act as prime movers of the "culture" and recreation we have available in our collections.

Joyce: Right, but the library has to move out of the building to really make contact with more people.

Jan: That's a problem. Our staffs are small and our budgets limited. We want a maximum product for a minimum input.

Joyce: OK. Let's think in terms of other ways than books through which people get information, entertainment and culture.

Jan: What? I thought books were the "only way" . . .

Joyce: Ha! Get serious; we need to come up with some good ideas.

Jan: How about a TV program, that focuses on the community, sponsored by our two libraries?

Joyce: Sounds good. This community needs to know about itself. Let's talk to our bosses.

GETTING STARTED

The heads of our libraries were enthusiastic about the idea and gave us what they could to get the show going — time. They looked at the TV show as a publicity device for the libraries and considered such publicity worthwhile.

Off we went to visit the manager of our local CABLE-TV Station because we knew that CABLE-TV stations are mandated by F.C.C. law to provide free public service programming. We didn't want to produce a typical library program — 15 minutes of a sit-down book review and children's story-telling. These belong on radio. We had the time, and the ambition, to produce something a bit more "relevant" (We like that cliché) to the community and exciting for us. The manager was vague about what he could do for us, but he did agree we could have a half-hour of free cable time.

Now we had to design the show. After discussion of various possibilities we decided to try a "magazine" format similar to CBS' *60 Minutes*. We wanted to provide information and entertainment in as many ways as possible. So, we divided the show into segments — local history, children's entertainment, community services, guides to local restaurants, interviews with local personalities, visual book reviews and scattered ads on library services. These categories were not "hard and fast." We agreed that we could add or drop segments as we felt the need. So there we were . . .

FREAKING OUT ON VIDEO (AND OTHER SUNDRY ITEMS)

Feeling that a non-static approach was essential, we decided that the segments should be in as many different visual forms as possible. The possibilities were slides, 8mm film, video tape, animation and live in-studio presentation. Video tape was the most "challenging" (Another helpful cliché) medium. Jan had some training in the use of video; she knew how to hold the Porta-pak camera. But neither library owned any

equipment, so we decided to stimulate a little inter-library cooperation by offering the local community college ad time in exchange for the use of their video equipment. They agreed, and the first project was the video-taping of a walk-through tour of one of the local museums.

That's when our problems started. Our idea of a walk-through-tour was dependent on a Porta-pak and none were available. Instead, we used a studio camera with floodlights. We spent a week trying to get a video-tape that would require no editing and could be transmitted directly onto TV.

After we got what we thought was about seven minutes of usable video-tape on the museum, we taped a two minute play period at a pre-school and a one minute visual book review of *Julie of the Wolves*. The visual book review is an approach we are developing which makes use of the visual aspect of TV and books. Our original idea was to do an animated interpretation of *The Tooth Trip* but the project was too time consuming and sophisticated for our skills at that point. By video-taping the illustration of *Julie of the Wolves* and using a voice-over description of the plot and a reading from the book, we felt we had captured a finer sense of the book's beauty and, hopefully, had transmitted this — visually and orally — to our audience.

CAMERA, LIGHTS, ACTION

Six months after our initial contact with the manager of the CABLE station, we returned with our show. We had the video-taped segments, slides of a new restaurant which we were reviewing, puppets for a live play presentation, and three teenagers. With the help of a photographer, we had worked up a photograph which symbolized the name of the show — our logo. We brought records of the theme music and backup music for one video segment.

Based on reading of TV studio needs, we had prepared a word-by-word, picture-by-picture script of the entire show. The script was supposed to help us maintain timing as we did voice-overs, and to help the technicians know when to do what with the camera.

The TV studio was slightly larger than the average library staff room. There were two studio cameras operating and small background sets in two corners of the room. The manager took over the job of technician in the control room and there was one cameraman. We had planned on simply running through the various segments, but the manager suggested we introduce ourselves and explain the show at the beginning. He felt that the show would have more cohesion if we reappeared at significant points, re-introducing ourselves and doing lead-ins to the segments. This wasn't in our script, and we weren't prepared to ad-lib. But, nervously, we did.

The manager was excited about our show, and consequently gave us more time and energy than we expected. We opened with the puppet show that Jan had prepared and that went smoothly. Then Joyce did an ad for the reference service at the Community College. At this point we had planned to insert our video of the museum and found it was not compatible with the CABLE-TV system. Panic! Jan ran out to the college in hopes of picking up a video recorder which would produce a more compatible image. Meanwhile, back at the CABLE Station, the show went on.

All the live portions of the show were master-taped.

The slide presentation of the restaurant was taped with a voice-over giving our critical review. Then the teenagers did an ad for a Young Adult program at the Marysville-Yuba County Library.

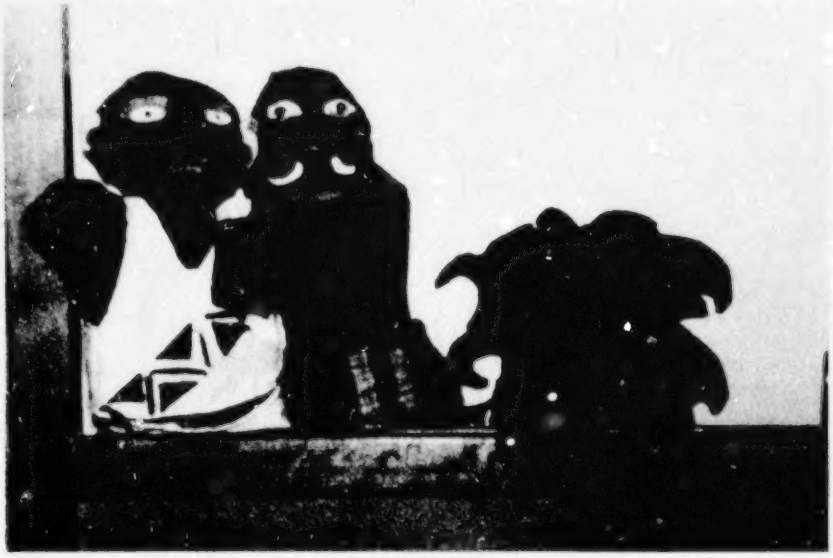
JAN AND JOYCE ON CAMERA

Joyce explained the new food stamp program in Sutter County for nine minutes. And then Jan returned.

She brought new equipment, but as it turned out, everything the college had was incompatible with the CABLE station's equipment. The college's equipment was old format (CV) and, not in the best condition. Channel 5 was equipped with new format (AV) Sony equipment. A merge of the two didn't work. So what were we going to do with all that video tape, and how were we going to complete the show? Fortunately, our timing of certain segments of the show had under-estimated the minutes we actually used. After the manager ran through the show, we discovered we had only five minutes to fill. We scrapped the museum tape and presented the pre-school segment as an experimental use of video. Surprisingly, the visual book review prepared on video tape transmitted well. Jan did a Sutter County Library ad on the Bermuda Triangle and we still had one minute to fill. So, we attempted a casual conversation inviting audience comment. As a feedback device, we presented a coupon offer on the food at the restaurant we had reviewed. We closed talking about Jan's summer program, and then as our logo appeared on the screen and our theme music came up we collapsed — only *slightly* hysterical.

HOW WE RATED

ButtesStrap was aired twice about a month later. We took the responsiblity of publicizing the show. As far as we could tell, the CABLE station did not even place their shows in the local newspaper TV listings. We contacted local radio stations and they gave us free public service announcements. The newspapers gave us short write-ups describing the show as local family entertainment. We



PILOT SHOW PUPPETS

had 500 publicity fliers made up and distributed as posters and handouts.

We had printed the coupons which we were offering through the restaurant. The coupon offer turned out to be unrealistic as a feedback device. People don't respond to write-in ads on TV unless they are for something they really want. However, we did get patron response at the libraries. Generally, the reactions were favorable, and people were picking up on the ideas and information we had offered. They wanted *Julie of the Wolves* and were angry that their taxes were paying for food stamps in Sutter County.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

The first production of ButtesStrap acted as our pilot. We are now scheduled for bimonthly airing beginning in September. Unfortunately, the CABLE Station has required the libraries to pay for the technical work involved in the master taping of each show. The average cost of each show is $30.00 As the libraries cannot absorb this cost, we will need to find a financial source. This source will not sponsor the show — the libraries do — but will buy time for the show as a public service. The manager of the CABLE Station suggested that we search for a source because the libraries will then receive a commission from the sale of the time. The cost of airing thirteen shows, a half season, is $500.00, of which the libraries receive 20%. We plan to put this money into the cost of producing the show, i.e., film and processing.

The personnel involved in putting *ButtesStrap* together is not limited to our library staffs. Volunteers abound. People interested in developing skill and experience in the use of video, photography and film offered their time from the beginning. After the show was aired we contacted, through the Community College, people we knew were already skilled in the use of the mediums we were using. We now have five people working with us regularly. As a result of their expertise, we are using 8mm film and animation in planning segments of future shows.

One side asset in doing the show is the amount of community information we are accumulating. We look forward to maintaining this information in hard copy in the libraries. Files containing the scripts on the restaurants, local history, and community services will be available to our patrons. Eventually we hope to have a library of cassette video-tapes of the show. At a cost of $20.00 per show, these tapes are available from the CABLE-TV Station. As our libraries plan on having video playback equipment in the near future our plan for a cassette library is not unrealistic. Included in this library availability plan is indexing. All information, hard copy or video, will be indexed in our card catalogs.

Over the past summer we have put together four shows to give us a backlog into November. We look forward to planning entire shows on special interest topics. For instance, we hope to develop a show around the problem of women, and one on the Chicano community. The possibilities are endless, and one doesn't have to go far to develop them. Digging into local history and developing community service information segments has forced us to *leave* the library, to go out into the community, and to become more fully aware of the people and needs the libraries are trying to service.

We hope *ButtesStrap* becomes a source for information, change and good will between the people and the libraries. But even if we had never moved beyond the preparation of the pilot we and the libraries would still have reaped tremendous benefits. We have seen the possibilities. Now all that remains is to pursue and implement them.

JOYCE SCROGGS *is reference librarian in the Sutter County Library*

JAN STUTER *is the Marysville Yuba County Public Library youth librarian*